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SUBJECT: SPANISH SOLDIERS KILLED IN LEBANON; GOS AND MAJOR
PARTIES SAY TROOPS WILL REMAIN

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY. On June 24, a car bomb attack killed six and wounded two Spanish soldiers serving in the UNIFIL mission in southern Lebanon. Spain has 1100 troops in UNIFIL and leads a multi-national brigade. Hizballah condemned the attack. Suspicion for the attack centers on Fatah al Islam, linked to Al Qaeda. Defense Minister Alonso and Foreign Minister Moratinos have both said publicly that Spanish troops will continue to serve in Lebanon. While the opposition Popular Party (PP) has attacked the GOS for misleading Spaniards about the risks faced in the mission, all parties except the minor Galician National Block continue to support Spanish participation in UNIFIL. Local press covered the Secretary and the Ambassador's expressions of condolence, and the Ambassador attended the official funeral on June 26. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) According to Alonso's statements, at approximately 6 pm local time on June 24, a Renault packed with 50-70 kg of explosives exploded alongside one of two armored personnel carriers patrolling near Jiam, near the Israel-Lebanon border. The car bomb killed six Spanish soldiers (three of whom were Colombian nationals) and injured two others. Alonso flew to Lebanon on the evening of June 24. After the remains were identified, he accompanied them back to Madrid on the evening of June 25. The Prince of Asturias, accompanied by President Zapatero and Alonso, presided over an official funeral in Madrid on June 26, which the Ambassador attended.

¶3. (U) Alonso has not publicly placed blame for the attack, but he noted that Hizballah had issued a communique condemning the attack. He said that it was carried out by people who "are attempting to destabilize southern Lebanon and question the mission of UNIFIL." Alonso and Director General of the National Police and Guardia Civil Joan Mesquida have spoken to Lebanese PM Siniora about the importance of identifying the attackers. Suspicion centers on Fatah al Islam. PP Parliamentary Spokesman for Foreign Affairs Gustavo de Aristegui expressed skepticism that Hezbollah was unaware of planning for the attack. De Aristegui said June 25 in a radio interview that Lebanese leaders had told him that the attack was a "clear message" from regional powers to UNIFIL. The Iranian government announced it would cooperate in the investigation of the attack at Spain's request. According to media reports, Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki spoke with Moratinos by phone June 25. Apparently Mottaki called Moratinos to express his condolences, and Moratinos then asked for Iran's assistance. Mottaki ordered Iran's ambassador in Beirut to

coordinate with the Spanish Embassy there.

14. (U) Alonso and FM Moratinos (who is in China with the King) have publicly affirmed that Spain troops will remain committed to the UNIFIL mission. All parties except the minor Galician National Block continue to support Spanish participation in UNIFIL. The PP has challenged the GOS's characterization of Spain's participation in UNIFIL, asking that Zapatero admit that he has sent Spanish troops to a war zone, rather than "trying to hide it by pretending pacifism."

The PP and leftist Izquierda Unida have asked the GOS to increase protective measures for Spanish troops where possible. Alonso has acknowledged that the Spanish military had not yet installed frequency inhibitors on its vehicles in Lebanon, though since last November it had begun to do so for vehicles used in overseas missions. The military initially focused the program in Afghanistan where it judged the threat higher. Alonso has ordered the installation program to be accelerated.

15. (U) Local press carried Secretary Rice's expressions of condolence and remarks on the attack from her press conference in Paris with French FM Kouchner on June 24. Ambassador Aguirre opened the EU-US Conference on Energy and Technology on June 25 by expressing his condolences for the death of the six soldiers. The conference was attended by Minister of Industry, Tourism, and Commerce Joan Clos. The Ambassador also called Spanish Chief of Defense General Sanz to offer sympathy. The Community of Madrid has declared two days of mourning. The Embassy lowered its flag to half-mast for one day as a sign of respect.

16. (U) Alonso was scheduled to testify to the Parliamentary Defense Commission on Tuesday, June 26 regarding Spain's plan to send two military training teams to Afghanistan, but this testimony has been postponed. He will appear in Parliament soon to explain the circumstances of the deaths in Lebanon.

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AGUIRRE